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ABSTRACT

These observations center around several themes having to do with the social position of today's professoriate, the future of their relationships to the institutions where they teach, and the future of academic freedom. The economic insecurity of a good section of the professoriate, especially the younger members, must be kept in mind. More than one half of faculty who teach in higher education have no opportunity to earn extra income, and nearly one-third of the teachers in higher education are earning an income below the national average family income. While the faculty must be accountable for its actions, that accountability cannot be achieved by increasing faculty insecurity. Another threat to faculty is in the area of academic freedom. This threat comes not so much from outside the academic community but from a timidity and acquiescence within the ranks. The most important function of higher education is to stimulate a perception of values that will enable the citizenry to shape the processes of economic development rather than be shaped by them. (Author/PG)

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# THE FUTURE OF THE PROFESSORIATE*

by

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I have been asked to speak about the future of college teaching or, more particularly, of college and university teachers.

Anticipating the topic assigned to me, I have puzzled how to proceed. I do not intend to engage in social prophecy. To try to predict the next decade would be a foolhardy task. A lot of social forecasting was going on ten or fifteen years ago. Many of those predictions look foolish today.

I am aware more than ever of the wisdom of an old Chinese proverb, which reads, roughly translated: "It is very hard to prophesy,...especially about the future!"

Perhaps what I am saying is only an elaboration of the title of an article in a journal I saw a few monthsago: "The Future Isn't What It Used To Be."

No, let my remarks today not stand as prophesy or prediction. Rather let me speculate on some characteristics of faculty life in American higher education today, and offer only some observations about the future.

It may be more important now than ever before for a speaker to begin with some remarks about his own angle of vision. So I should begin getting my cards on the table as to my own values and perceptions. I feel personally the anguish of the intellectual perplexity and malaise of the times in which we live. But I will not add my remarks today to the lament of those who regret the passing of an earlier and simpler time. As dissatisfied as I may be with the present, I speak with hope even when I find it hard to muster great optimism about the next few years.

So much of what is offered as commentary on higher education takes the form of regret for the passing of a seemingly simpler time, a more dynamic era, years when we sensed more unanimity of purpose and consensus of values. For my own part, I look back upon the troubled decade and a half since 1960 with an essential sense of achievement both for our society at large and for higher education. To be sure I regard as ominous the trends in our culture and national life, which lead us into a misbegotten military adventure in Southeast Asia and which have resulted in an economy still indentured to massive and wasteful military spending. I am stunned by the possible implications for the future of our Republic of the seemingly endless string of events which we have come to call Watergate. And I must add that I view our current economic miseries as symptoms of a fundamental flaw in our economic system and not simply as minor or passing aberations.

These cryptic remarks indicate a fundamental disquiet about the future, which affects my perspective and to which I will return later. I want to distinguish myself at the outset, however, from those who look on the past decade or two as a time of

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disillusion and decline when things began to fall apart. I would rather take my stand with Daniel Patrick Moynahan, the enigmatic Celt who in 1973 wrote these words about the 1960's:

> We overdid a lot of things, but...we came out a stronger society. Fifteen years ago ours was a caste society with respect to race; it no longer is. Fifteen years ago ours was a society in which the hegemony of the male, the normal presumption of male dominance, male exclusiveness in social and political and economic affairs was a given; it no longer is. Ours was a society fifteen years ago which was almost impervious to the thought that it had many problems of its own; it was much too eager to see problems in other countries and other places and to seek to deal with them.... /Today/ we feel not so sure of ourselves as we were; we know the limits of our power; we have tested the limits of our will; we aren't going to take quite so many chances. And yet that too is a sign of maturity. That too, in some respects, marks the movement... /into a period/ in which the fact of limitation of power, of energy, of integrity even, is acknowledged and learned and lived with.

And so let me be registered as one whose hopes are chastened, whose faith is tempered by skepticism, but not as one who describes the events which have brought us to where we are today in the groves of higher education as some kind of fall from grace.

There is one more opening comment about my own perspective which I should register here. I take the fundamental fact of contemporary intellectual life, the keystone of our enterprise, to be a new awareness of the uncertainty of our knowledge. There are some who lament that, but I believe it is a fact for celebration. It makes appropriate a kind of intellectual humility that some have called a failure of nerve. But I think it is rather a promise of greater humanity.

I refer to what Jacob Bronowski says is the intellectual significance of the scientific Principle of Uncertainty. "In science or outside it," Bronowski says, it is not so much that we are uncertain as that our knowledge is "merely confined within a certain tolerance.... All knowledge, all information between human beings can only be exchanged within a play of tolerance. And that is true whether the exchange is in science, or in literature, or in religion, or in politics, or even in any form of thought that aspires to dogma."

This awareness of the fundamental limitations of thought and systems of thought came to science rather more easily and earlier than to the other disciplines. The arrogance in high places of the "Best and Brightest," which did so much national mischief in the hamlets and villages of South Vietnam and Cambodia, has left a legacy of national shame. That kind of intellectual and moral arrogance was matched too often by social scientists of the Left and Right who dominated too much of the intellectual debate of the last decade. And perhaps you will permit me to observe that no small amount of writing and posturing about higher education has been marked by an air of academic "certainty" which is today neither appropriate nor intellectually sound.

We have come to the end of a time of academic hubris to a time of more measured proclamation and less certainty that brightness breeds virtue, or that culture in the

American mode is somehow the apex of the human adventure. And I believe the intellectual challenge and the academic spirit of today are better for this new awareness of the uncertainty of all knowledge.

And now to the professors! Let me order my observations around several themes having to do with the social location of today's professoriate, with the future of their relationships to the institutions in which they teach, and with the future of academic freedom.

Once more, a final word is in order about my own perspective on these matters. Robert Benchley used to tell a story about his final exams in his senior year at Harvard. As he entered the classroom one day, he faced this question on the blackboard: "Describe the 1910 Treaty and Negotiations over off-shore fishing rights between the United States and Great Britain; discuss the treaty from the points of view both of the U.S. and the British." Benchley sat down with his exam book for a while, scratched his head, and then wrote, "I'm afraid I can say very little of the negotiations over off-shore fishing and the treaty that ensued in 1910 from the points of view of either the United States or the British; I will, however, discuss the treaty from the point of view of the fish."

I too speak today from a particular point of view! Since coming to the AAUP some months ago from a decade of teaching in relatively sheltered institutions in a time of expansion and prosperity, I believe I have had an opportunity to observe the situations of those who teach in a wide variety of colleges and universities throughout the country. I believe my vision has sharpened a bit about this profession.

First, I observe that higher education in America is many things today; a great variety of institutions and situations. But I would observe that much of the writing and talking about higher education comes from a relatively small community of persons from a relatively restricted number of institutions. And unfortunately not much of that commentary on higher education comes from situations that are typical of a great number of the working faculty of the country. All of this adds up to my first proposition: that most of us who talk about higher education, and indeed who write about it, may at times be too glib in making generalizations about colleges and universities in America.

Higher education in America includes of course the Ivy Leagues, with a great sense of noble tradition, where students and even faculty who come from ethnic or lower-income groups still, even in 1975, are taken more often as token gestures to new demands for equality of opportunity than as integral parts of the scene.

Higher education in America includes the widespread one-upmanship of degrees from the "best" institutions. And it includes the genteel securities of the "old boy" and "new boy" networks, as well as the rough shabbiness of those public institutions in many parts of the land where political demagogues intimidate both faculty and administration.

Higher education in America still harbors the aura of an old elitism embraced all the more compulsively by those who only recently have clawed their way out of marginal social status.

And higher education in America today is a field of vocational stress: young teachers insecure in a shrinking market and older teachers who ponder their future in a fad-oriented, youth-obsessed society.

I should be the last to plead the case for a beleagured band of teachers who need the sympathy of society. That is not the objective of my remarks. What I want to suggest to you as strongly as I can are some of the reasons why, as one observer put it to me recently, "college teachers these days are getting to be a feisty bunch."

I have seen all kinds of explanations for what some call "faculty militance." I have read psychological analyses and organizational theories which attempt to explain why this is happening. Some of my friends in administrative posts have expressed to me their consternation at what they see as a growing sense of adversarial relationships between faculty and administration, which more and more seem to lead to talk of collective bargaining on the campus.

I do not believe this restlessness and new "militance" (if that is an apt term for it) stem from any deep psychological unhappiness, nor from an inate conservatism among faculty. And I believe that academic reformers who begin with such an analysis are far off the mark. Too many books about the malaise of higher education in recent years have begun with a simplistic analysis which paints the faculty as the source of the trouble.

Perhaps a good case in point is the book published several years ago by Lewis Mayhew of Stanford. Professor Mayhew's book, Arrogance on Campus, is a generally well-balanced discussion of some problems of academic performance. It is easy to see, however, that the bete noire of Mayhew's analysis is the faculty. I quote from one passage where he offers an analysis of stirrings among the faculty:

> Feelings of powerlessness on the part of professors are aggravated by an underlying feeling of insecurity, which seems endemic in academic man. Sociologists describe marginal men as people who have left one group or culture and who are striving to enter another but do not make it. Marginal people are characterized by feelings of anxiety, frustration, and quite often rage. In a sense many academic men are marginal. Some, with lower class backgrounds, use intelligence and education to move into the higher classes of society. As college professors, they have many of the attributes of the higher classes but still do not make important social, economic, or political decisions.... The result is these feelings of insecurity and anxiety which professors seek to relieve through striking out at the system or organizing to defeat it.

And, in another passage, Mayhew continues

> Among traditional vices faculty conservatism is the most endemic and hurtful. College professors do not like educational change and will not undertake it unless forced by an external power (for example, students), bribed by financial inducements, or persuaded by powerful leaders. The great innovations in higher education were all generated outside the faculty and imposed over faculty opposition.

I single out these examples to indicate a tone and a trend widespread in writing about the future of higher education in America. Professor Mayhew's examples

represent only a more honest statement of the bias of a good number of those who offer prescriptions about the future of the academy.

I do not suggest that such an analysis of the situation of higher education today may not be in part accurate. Indeed, as I have said, I find much of Professor Mayhew's book perceptive and helpful. But I suggest that his analysis is flawed by a social and intellectual bias of no small magnitude. I want to return later in my remarks to the intellectual bias, but let me first take up the social bias.

I propose, first of all, that most of us who comment upon the responsibilities of the professoriate must keep in mind the economic insecurity of a good section of that profession, especially its younger members. I do not begin here with any plea for a Marxian perspective but only with a plea for an understanding of the actual economic plight of many, particularly younger teachers in the colleges and universities of this country. The decade of the 1960's was a time of significant improvement in faculty compensation. When we look at the surveys of faculty salaries, the first impression is that things are not so bad. But I have had recently to correct some misconceptions in my own assumptions in this area, and I suspect these are widespread.

Our perspective is shaped too often by a quick look at the salary scales of some of the major state universities and college systems, and the assumption that most faculty have extra opportunities to earn income through consulting or summer teaching.

Recently I began to raise a few questions about those assumptions and about the distribution of income among college teachers. Our data here is not too precise. I will not dwell long upon the point. But I think it is important to pass on to you two conclusions which experienced analysists have told me are consistent with what we do know:

> First, it appears that more than one half of those who teach in our colleges and universities have no opportunity to earn extra income by summer teaching or through the high-paid consultations we hear so much about. The supposition that that kind of extra income is widespread among college and university teachers is a myth.
>
> Second, nearly one-third of the college and university teachers in America today are earning an income below the national average family income; that is, below the figure of approximately $13,500.

So when Dr. Mayhew speaks of the social marginality of college teachers, it is not alone the kind of psychological phenomenon that he suggests. There is a widespread tendency for many to characterize the American social scene by referring to truck drivers who earn $20,000 or sanitation workers who earn $15,000 a year, or professors who earn $30,000.00. All these examples exist. But all are exceptions which distort our perceptions of social reality. Most truck drivers earn less than half of that $20,000, most sanitation workers in this country earn not much more than welfare benefits, and most teachers are not flying around the country picking up high consultation fees, some traditions in the Ivy League and the Big Ten notwithstanding.

So those who puzzle over a certain new sense of faculty frustration ought to bear in mind the serious economic plight of many young teachers in America and their perception that things are not likely to get much better.

I will not apologize for raising that economic fact here today, in the context of a conference devoted to educational reform, since I propose to you that any movement for reform and rearrangement in American higher education which ignores this fundamental fact of the economic insecurity of so great a portion of those who teach in the classrooms has a kind of Alice in Wonderland quality about it.

Reform in American higher education must be seen as only one aspect of urgently needed reform in the social and economic structure. I propose there would be a greater sense of reality in the proclamation of those who seek educational reform if they at least acknowledged the relationship of the academy to the society. The fact is that education is not a lever for broad social reform but one of many strands of our cultural life and institutional arrangements which must somehow be untangled and rewoven into a more humane and liberating pattern.

I continue then by suggesting that much comment about reform in higher education is characterized by naivete about the actual institutional behavior of our colleges and universities which also breeds faculty unrest. But worse than that, this widespread naivete about the actual institutional, political, and social arrangements with which we deal prevents both engagement with and resolution of conflict in the university.

Among faculty and administrators alike there is too often a failure to acknowledge the truly corporate nature of the institutions to which they are related. Faculty, on the one hand, sometimes talk and act as if they are freefloating entrepreneurs when they are, in fact, facing a public which demands a much more explicit rationale for continuing to pay the rising costs of higher education. (I may add that, in my own experience, the public is not only demanding such a rationale but are willing to listen to it as well. And that they are more receptive to talk of values, of the need for independence in our centers of learning, and of the importance of general education than most spokesmen for higher education would assume. The public today asks for a rationale for higher education, and we too often show them only our budget charts!)

But it is not only the faculty which acts naively. Administrators and trustees also fail to acknowledge the corporate nature of their institutions. Some cling to the myths of an earlier era. They envision a community of learning and research which somehow should be exempt from the stringent public scrutiny and skepticism which today is directed toward all institutions.

Many of our centers of higher education, both public and independent, have emerged as major employers in communities and regions across the country. In construction, housing, food services, security, and recreation, as well as educational offerings, they are complex corporate structures. They call for governance and management of a different order than the bureaucratic oligarchies of the past. Too often there is an assumption among the trustees and administrators that somehow the particular educational mission of our colleges and universities should exempt them from the normal demands of social responsibilities which we expect from other institutions. It is not unusual for a president or a trustee, who would be shocked if an industrial firm in a local community laid off a thirty-year employee who had little prospect of finding another position, to accept that kind of behavior from a college without such qualms.

The plight of the university community is shared by all its participants. There must be an acknowledgement of shared concerns about the purpose and the efficient operation of those institutions. There also is now, and will be in the future, a sense of adversarial roles involved in the fulfillment of those responsibilities. We need to set about to structure the life of the academy by basic institutional reforms in the way we relate to each other as well as by instructional innovations. I know that there are those who deplore the coming of a sense of adversarial relationships within the academy as well as in the society at large. There are those who plead for a return to the days of paternal benevolence, of informal arrangements of mutual trust unacknowledged by explicit, upfront procedures for all to see. But they plead for a return to days that never were.

I suspect it is both inevitable and healthy that we play adversarial roles. There are indeed different interests and perspectives emerging into a common concern for institutions where both joy and learning can occur. Faculty, administration, and students, in healthy adversarial arrangements, must inevitably challenge each other with claims of responsibility. Such open give-and-take within the academy, conducted with civility and compromise, will finally be in the best interests of the future of higher education.

In the present stage, when we are only now learning to live with these new and, in most cases unacknowledged, realities, there is much posturing and much oversimplification on all sides. Sometimes faculty representatives talk in simplistic terms of the "power structure" within their institutions as if they were only employees, while at the same time they claim, as I believe they should, basic prerogatives for the exercise of professional judgment and responsibility. And some administrators wring their hands at the need to make explicit institutional demands of, as well as responsibilities toward, the faculty. I agree with Professor Lance Liebman of the Harvard Law School who has called for more "explicitness" in defining our internal relationships, "our understandings of what we are about and how we go about our business." Liebman writes further, "The point is rather that a period of explicitness is now arriving at colleges, long a bastion of honest statement about Senegal and Baudelaire and the atom, but a silent, cabalistic ritual in its internal affairs."

There is no doubt in my mind that just as the faculty will call an institution to greater accountability, arrangements must be found to ensure faculty accountability. That accountability will not be achieved, however, by increasing faculty insecurity. Too many recent treatises on educational reform in America have been built on the central assumption that the single most important innovation for the future well being of higher education would be the abolition of tenure commitments to the faculty in order to ensure "flexibility in planning" for those who administer our institutions. I have no doubt whatsoever that we need arrangements to ensure greater accountability from the faculty. Most professional groups in our society need such structural demands to ensure responsible performance. And most professional communities resist such arrangements, not so much out of human perversity as out of self-interest. But the challenge which faces our society and those who care about the profession in question, whether medicine, law, or teaching--the challenge is to find structural arrangements which protect the integrity of the profession without isolating practice from the public demand for accountability.

Ah, "accountability"! That single word which intimidates the faculty, demoralizes the deans, and sends presidents and chancellors into early retirement!

-- The word used by those who would garb traditional no-nothingism in the guise of vigilante protection of the public interest.

-- The word sometimes used by one party in the academy to pillar another.

But the term describes the plight and dilemma of the total community, and of those who have a stake in and care for the future of higher education.

There is to my mind no single arena in America where the human capacity for self-governance and civil dialogue will be more clearly revealed in the next decade than on the campuses of our colleges and universities. I say that even with my own conviction that the campus is finally at the mercy of whatever happens to the society at large. The major issues in our society are no longer those of our right to govern ourselves or of the necessity for civil discourse, negotiation and compromise in the interest in sharing power and authority. No, the pivotal questions which the campus, and indeed our civilization, face now are not those having to do with our right or need to govern ourselves but those having to do with our capacity and our will to govern outselves. The question then is whether we have the capacity for the restraint, the energy and determination, the care and the sensitivity necessary to shape our own destinies.

I want to bring these remarks to a conclusion with a final word about the future of academic freedom. I return here to some of the themes with which I began these observations.

The AAUP has been deeply involved for six decades with efforts to state the nature and responsibilities of what we call academic freedom. These efforts continue today in a new and changing environment. I began by pointing out that higher education in America is many things, a wide variety of situations and circumstances. What troubles me, as we talk of meeting new demands and reforming our curricular offerings in order to adapt to new needs of society, is that we may lose sight of another significant function of higher education. I refer to the fact that the higher education community has been, and must remain, a center for challenging and questioning the conventional wisdom of the society. In the 1960's, we passed through a decade of debate about the relation between scholarship and political activism. The academy today is deeply divided over questions that have to do with objectivity and values.

I am persuaded that there are times when threats to academic freedom do not come so much from attack or intimidation from outside the academic community as from a kind of timidity or acquiescence within our own ranks. I believe this is such a time. One of the social functions of higher education is to provide the skills demanded by a changing economic process. But the most important function of higher education is to stimulate a perception of values which will enable the citizenry to shape the processes of economic development rather than be shaped by them.

The vision I have of the dilemmas of academic freedom in the future were expressed over 140 years ago by Alexis de Tocqueville in Democracy in America. In an incredibly prophetic passage in Book VI, entitled What Sort of Despotism Democratic Nations Have to Fear, de Tocqueville anticipated the central problem of academic freedom in our time, not a confrontation with external repression but the consequences of the surrender of civic courage and critical judgment.

Let me in closing quote from de Tocqueville's grim prospect:

> ...Democratic governments may become violent, and even cruel, at certain periods of extreme effervescence or of great danger; but these crises will be rare and brief. When I consider the petty passions of our contemporaries, ...the extent of their education,...the gentleness of their morality,... and the restraint which they almost all observe in their vices no less than in their virtues, I have no fear that they will meet with tyrants in their rulers but rather with guardians.
>
> I think, then, that the species of oppression by which democratic nations are menaced is unlike anything which ever before existed in the world....I seek in vain for an expression which will accurately convey the idea I have formed of it; the old words "despotism" and "tyranny" are inappropriate. The thing itself is new, and, since I cannot name, I must attempt to define it.

I seek to trace the novel features under which despotism may appear in the world. The first thing that strikes the observation is an innumerable multitude of men, all equal and alike, incessantly endeavoring to procure... pleasures with which they glut their lives. Each of them, living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of all the rest--his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of mankind; as for the rest of his fellow-citizens, he is close to them, but he sees them not--he touches them, but he feels them not; he exists but in himself and for himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said, at any rate, to have lost his country.

Above this race of men stands an immense...power which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications and to watch over their fate. That power is absolute...regular, provident, and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent, if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks, on the contrary, to keep them in perpetual childhood; it is well content that the people should rejoice, provided they think of nothing but rejoicing. For their happiness such a government willingly labors, but it chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of that happiness; it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns,... what remains but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living?...

The will of man is not shattered but softened, bent, and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting. Such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to be nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.

I have always thought that servitude of the regular, quiet, and gentle kind which I have just described might be combined more easily than is commonly believed with some of the outward forms of freedom and that it might even establish itself under the wing of the sovereignty of the people....

The kind of future de Tocqueville envisions will be, I believe, the challenge before those who will seek to preserve academic freedom in the future.

The issue will not be whether we have the freedom to speak. It will be whether we have anything to say!